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AUTHOR Miller, Wilma H.
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ABSTRACT

The existence of possible relationships between home environmental factors and children's reading readiness in kindergarten was sought in this study. The specific home environmental factors examined were maternal teaching style, maternal language style, children's daily schedules, and home prereading activities. A description of earlier studies made in the same area was given. The populations for the study consisted of 75 mothers and their 75 kindergarten-aged children in a central Illinois city. The sample was divided into three social classes: middle class, upper-lower, and lower-lower. Home interviews were made, and later the Murphy-Durrell Reading Readiness Analysis was administered to the children. Findings indicated that only the factor of maternal language style was related to reading readiness. But, it was concluded that additional research is needed for all four factors. References are included. (NH)

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Wilma H. Miller
Illinois State University
Normal, Illinois 61761

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CERTAIN HOME ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND CHILDREN'S READING READINESS

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The purpose of this study was to discover possible relationships which may exist between certain home environmental factors and children's reading readiness in kindergarten. Specifically, the home environmental factors studied were maternal teaching style, maternal language style, children's daily schedules, and home pre-reading activities.

Related Research

Bernstein of The University of London apparently was the first researcher to differentiate and describe two language styles which typically are used by members of different social classes. He described the elaborated language style, primarily used by members of the middle class, as a manner of speech in which a person usually employs complex sentence structure, many uncommon adjectives and adverbs, a precise vocabulary, and correct grammar. On the other hand, Bernstein described the restricted language style, typically used by members of the lower classes, as a manner of speaking in which an individual employs simple sentence structure, few uncommon adjectives and adverbs, an imprecise vocabulary, and incorrect grammar. (1)

Hess (presently of Stanford University) and his associates conducted research at the Urban Child Center of The University of Chicago on the relation of maternal language style and children's cognitive level. They found a significant relation between the level of abstraction of a mother's language and the cognitive style level achieved by her child. These researchers discovered that if a mother employed an elaborated language style, her child was very likely to employ a high level of cognitive style. (3)

In another study, Hess and his associates discovered that a mother's teaching style as illustrated during a structured mother-child interaction in which each mother taught her child how to reproduce several designs on an "Etch-a-Sketch" was related to the cognitive style level achieved by her child. These researchers discovered that if a mother employed an active teaching style in which she gave her child specific directions about reproducing a design, the

child usually achieved a high cognitive level. On the other hand, they found that if a mother employed a passive teaching style in which she gave few specific directions and little reinforcement as the child was reproducing a design, her child generally achieved a low cognitive level. (2)

Miller conducted research in which she attempted to relate several home environmental factors and children's readiness in kindergarten and subsequent first-grade reading achievement. She found that maternal teaching style as illustrated during a structured mother-child interaction in which each mother taught her child how to assemble a simple jigsaw puzzle was related to children's reading readiness but not to first-grade reading achievement. (4)

Miller further discovered that maternal language as evaluated by the five language scales of Mean Sentence Length, Adjective Range, Adverb Range, Verb Elaboration, and Complex Verb Preference was not related to reading readiness, but maternal language as measured by the scale of Syntactic Structure Elaboration was related to reading readiness. She found that maternal language as evaluated by the scales of Mean Sentence Length, Adverb Range, and Syntactic Structure Elaboration was related to first-grade reading achievement. (4)

Miller further determined that children's typical daily home activities were not related to children's reading readiness or to first-grade reading achievement. She also found that home prereading activities as ascertained from mothers by the use of a structured parent schedule were related to children's reading readiness, but were related to first-grade reading achievement only in the middle class. (4)

Description of the Subjects and Methods of Collecting and Treating the Data

The sample for this study consisted of seventy-five mothers and their seventy-five kindergarten-aged children residing in a central Illinois city. The sample was divided into three social classes using the criteria developed

by Hess and his researchers. (3) The middle-class group consisted of mothers and children who were members of college-educated professional, executive, or managerial families; the upper-lower class group was composed of mothers and children who were members of high school-educated skilled families; and the lower-lower class mothers and children were members of predominantly elementary school-educated semiskilled or unskilled families. Each group consisted of twenty-five mothers and their twenty-five children.

During the winter of 1968-1969 the investigator conducted home interviews with each mother and child to gather four types of data. A structured mother-child interaction which consisted of each mother showing her child how to assemble a simple jigsaw puzzle of the Winnie-the-Pooh motif was designed to assess maternal teaching style in terms of active or passive teaching characteristics. A tape-recorded language protocol also was obtained from each mother as she told her child a story about a picture from a book the investigator brought to the home interview. This langauge protocol later was analyzed using the following language scales that were formulated by Hess and his associates: Mean Sentence Length, Adjective Range, Adverb Range, Verb Elaboration, Complex Verb Preference, and Syntactic Structure Elaboration. (3) The typical daily home activities of each child also were obtained from each mother. Finally, home prereading activities in which each child had engaged were ascertained by the use of maternal responses to a structured parent schedule of home prereading activities.

In May of 1969, the investigator administered the Murphy-Durrell Reading Readiness Analysis to the seventy-five kindergarten-aged children in the sample. These children were attending kindergarten in six elementary schools in a central Illinois city. Relationships existing between the variables obtained

during the home interviews and the children's total score on the reading readiness test were studied by the use of correlation procedures.*

Results

From examination of Table 1, it is evident that maternal teaching style as illustrated by maternal statements during the structured mother-child interaction was not significantly related to children's reading readiness. This table indicates that none of the correlations came close to being significant.

Table 1

Correlations Between Maternal Teaching Style and Children's Reading Readiness Scores

Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Maternal Teaching Style (Middle Class) [1]	.00
Maternal Teaching Style (Upper-Lower Class) [2]	.05
Maternal Teaching Style (Lower-Lower Class) [3]	.12

Significance was determined using the one-tailed test.

[1] 25 Observations

[2] 25 Observations

[3] 25 Observations

*All correlations were computed on an IBM 36040 Computer at Illinois State University.

Table 2 indicates that in general there was no significant relation between maternal language as evaluated by six language scales and children's reading as measured by readiness in the middle class. However, the maternal language scale of Snytactic Structure Elaboration more nearly approached a level of significance than did the remaining five language scales.

Table 2

Correlations Between Six Maternal Language Scales and Children's Reading Readiness Scores

Middle-Class Group

Independent Variables 25 Observations	Correlation Coefficient
Mean Sentence Length	.18
Adjective Range	.12
Adverb Range	-.12
Verb Elaboration	.04
Complex Verb Preference	.06
Syntactic Structure Elaboration	.22

Significance was determined using the one-tailed test.

From examination of Table 3, one can note that in the upper-lower class no significant correlations were found between maternal language as measured by six language scales and children's reading readiness. However, also in this group maternal language as measured by the scale of Syntactic Structure Elaboration more nearly reached a level of significance than did maternal language as measured by the remaining five language scales.

Table 3

Correlations Between Six Maternal Language Scales and Children's Reading Readiness Scores

Upper-Lower Class Group

Independent Variables 25 Observations	Correlation Coefficient
Mean Sentence Length	.19
Adjective Range	.27
Adverb Range	.34
Verb Elaboration	.14
Complex Verb Preference	.01
Syntactic Structure Elaboration	.36

Significance was determined by using the one-tailed test.

Table 4 indicates that in the lower-lower class there were no significant correlations found between maternal language as measured by six language scales and children's reading readiness. However, in this group maternal language as measured by the scale of Verb Elaboration more nearly reached a level of significance.

Table 4

Correlations Between Six Maternal Language Scales and Children's Reading Readiness Scores

Lower-Lower Class Group

Independent Variables 25 Observations	Correlation Coefficient
Mean Sentence Length	.09
Adjective Range	.25
Adverb Range	-.05
Verb Elaboration	-.34
Complex Verb Preference	.11
Syntactic Structure Elaboration	.07

Significance was determined using the one-tailed test.

One can note from Table 5 that there were no significant correlations found between children's daily schedules in any of the three social classes and children's scores on the reading readiness test.

None of these three correlation coefficients approached a level of significance.

Table 5

Correlations Between Children's Daily Schedules and Children's Reading Readiness Scores

Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Children's Daily Schedules (Middle Class) [1]	-.19
Children's Daily Schedules (Upper-Lower Class) [2]	-.03
Children's Daily Schedules (Lower-Lower Class) [3]	.00

Significance was determined using the one-tailed test.

[1] 25 Observations

[2] 25 Observations

[3] 25 Observations

Table 6 indicates that there was a correlation coefficient significant at the .05 level found between home prereading activities in the middle class and children's reading readiness scores. However, no significant correlations were found between home prereading activities and children's reading readiness within the upper-lower and lower-lower classes.

Table 6

Correlations Between Home Prereading Activities and Children's Reading Readiness Scores

Independent Variables	Correlation Coefficient
Prereading Activities (Middle Class) [1]	.39*
Prereading Activities (Upper-Lower Class) [2]	.18
Prereading Activities (Lower-Lower Class) [3]	.07

Significance was determined using the one-tailed test.

*Significant at the .05 level.

[1] 25 Observations

[2] 25 Observations

[3] 25 Observations

Conclusions

The findings of this study indicated that only the home environmental factors of maternal language as evaluated by the three scales of Syntactic Structure Elaboration, Adverb Range, and Verb Elaboration and home prereading activities were found to be related to children's reading readiness in kinder- kindergarten.

However, maternal language may still warrant additional research because of its possible relation to children's reading readiness in kindergarten. Although the correlation coefficients did not reach the .05 level of significance, one must remember that the size of the sample was quite small.

The absence of significant correlation coefficients between home prereading activities in the upper-lower and lower-lower classes and children's reading readiness indeed is a surprising finding. The writer's previous research discovered significant correlations between these two variables in all three social classes. Therefore, the converse findings in this study cannot be explained by the writer in the light of previous research.

Therefore, the relation between maternal language and children's reading readiness and between home prereading activities and children's reading readiness undoubtedly needs additional replication research.

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